DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 370 718 PS 022 479

AUTHOR Peet, Susan H.

TITLE Information Use among Parents of Preschool-Aged Children: Links to Parent and Child Gender, Domain of Development, and Child's Developmental Level.

PUB DATE Apr 94

NOTE 34p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 4-8, 1994).

PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Analysis of Variance; *Child Development; *Child Rearing; Cognitive Development; Developmental Stages; *Information Seeking; *Information Utilization; Motor Development; *Parents; *Preschool Children; Preschool Education; Sex Differences; Social Development

ABSTRACT

This study explored the way parents use information sources for information about their child's motor, social, and cognitive development. This study sought to identify: (1) variations in parental use of information based on the domain of the child's development for which the parent sought information; (2) the role of parent and child gender in patterns of parental information use; and (3) the extent to which parental information use varies with indicators of the child's development. Sixty parents of 3-year-olds were interviewed about the size of their information network, frequency of use of information sources, and usefulness of information sources. These items were related to the variables of parent and child gender, domain of child's development, and child's developmental level. Analysis showed that information use varied according to all four variables, most importantly for the domain of the child's development. Results also showed that: (1) parents had significantly larger information networks for information about their child's social development than cognitive and motor development; (2) fathers, more than mothers, used cognitive information sources, and found them to be more useful; (3) parents of girls who scored in the lowest third of the sample on a vocabulary test had significantly larger information networks than did parents of other girls; and (4) parents of boys used information sources more than did parents of girls. (TM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

ED 370 718

Information Use Among Parents of Preschool-Aged Children: Links to Parent and Child Gender, Domain of Development, and Child's Developmental Level

Susan H. Peet

Purdue University
Department of Child Development and Family Studies
West Lafayette, Indiana 47907-1267

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Susan H. Peet

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 022479

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA, April 4-8, 1994.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

Sixty mothers and fathers of a three-year-old boy or girl completed an information use interview designed to identify ways parents use information sources for information about their child's motor, social, and cognitive development. The size of the parents' information network, the frequency of use of information sources and the usefulness of information sources were examined in relation to the variables of parent and child gender, domain of development, and child's developmental level. Analysis of variance analyses showed that parents have significantly larger information networks for information about their child's social development than for information about the child's cognitive and motor development. Fathers, more than mothers, used the cognitive information sources, and found the sources to be significantly more useful. Parents of girls who scored in the lowest third of the sample on the PPVT-R had significantly larger information networks than parents of children who scored in the middle or highest third of the sample. The findings of this study refine previous findings about how parents seek and use information by showing variations in the way mothers and fathers seek information according to the child's gender and developmental level, and the domain of the child's development for which the information is sought.

Information Use Among Parents of Preschool-Aged Children: Links to Parent and Child Gender, Domain of Development, and Child's Developmental Level

In its broadest sense, the central task of parenting is to support the development of a child. One way that parents support children's development is by assuming the role of manager of the child's environment (Parke & Bhavnagri, 1989; Parke & Slaby, 1983). From an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), by choice or circumstance a parent constantly makes decisions that directly and indirectly impact the child's experiences. Parents must make choices about things as diverse as toy selection, appropriateness of child care settings, child guidance and discipline, and promoting or avoiding sex role stereotypical materials. Goodnow and Collins (1990) indicate that parents make these decisions by tapping their own experiences with children and by tapping the advice of others. This study extends the existing literature on how parents gather information about their child's development by exploring variations in parent information use according to characteristics associated with the child (i.e., child's gender, child's developmental progress, and the domain of the child's development for which the information is being sought). An additional purpose of this study is to explore ways that information use may differ for mothers and fathers. Gaining a more detailed understanding of ways parents seek and use information will benefit practitioners and program developers who interact directly with parents, and will

extend the existing knowledge base about the sources of parents' ideas about children's development.

About a decade ago several studies documented where parents go for information about child rearing (Bartz, 1978; Crase, Carlson & Kontos, 1981; Geboy, 1981; Hughes & Durio, 1983; Koepke & Williams, 1989). Although these studies provide useful information in terms of initially documenting patterns of information use, they do little to advance an understanding of the complexities associated with how parents seek and use information about their child's development. Social cognition research has shown that factors such as salience of the issue and perceived responsibility impact how and when parents seek information (reviewed in Goodnow & Collins, 1991). Additional research from developmental psychology has highlighted the influence of parent and child gender on how parents process information about their children (Knight & Goodnow, 1988; Block, 1983). The findings from these literatures suggest that parents are likely to seek and use information in ways that are unique to their needs and situations.

One limitation of the existing literature on information use is the lack of specificity about which information sources parents use for different types of information. For example, the existing literature shows that parents frequently talk to pediatricians for information about the child's development (Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Crase et al., 1981). From this finding the assumption is made that parents believe pediatricians are experts in all aspects of the child's development, and therefore

parents turn to pediatricians for information regardless of the type of information that is wanted. Unfortunately, past studies have not specified the type of information parents seek from pediatricians, or any other information source, so these studies are unable to inform questions about ways parents use different information sources for different purposes.

According to attribution theory (Langer, 1975 cited in Knight & Goodnow, 1988), the skills that are the most highly valued are the ones over which people seek to exercise control. Knight and Goodnow (1988) found that parents believe they have more influence over socio-emotional characteristics than over cognitive characteristics. One hypothesis explored in this study is possibility that parents of preschool-age children seek more information about children's social development than motor or cognitive development. Understanding more about the kinds of information sources parents turn to for information will help practitioners and program developers meet the needs of parents.

A second way the existing literature on parental information use is limited is by not acknowledging the bidirectionality of the influence of children's development on parents' behaviors (Bell, 1968; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). The assumption that parents engage in seeking and using information independent of their child's developmental level disregards the conceptualization of a parent as a "constructivist" (McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 1982) in terms of their perceptions about their child's development. From the constructivistic perspective, a parent is likely to engage in an elaborate dynamic of

information seeking by tapping both the unique information they have about their child and the information provided from additional information sources to construct the parent's perception of the child's development. The parent's perception of the child and his or her development is then likely to be related to the extent and ways parents seek information about the child's development.

Attribution theory provides a useful framework for predicting the relationship between parent information use and children's development. From this perspective, a negative or surprising outcome is likely to initiate a "causal search" for explanations of the outcome (Weiner, 1986). Therefore, the hypothesis that is explore in this study is that parents of children who are developing slower than age-equivalent peers are likely to seek more information about the child's development than parents of children who are developing ahead of or at the same rate with age-equivalent peers.

Parent and child gender are analyzed in this study because they encapsulate variations in experience based on gender. Past studies have shown that parent gender is related to ways mothers and fathers use information (Crase et al., 1981). Mothers tend to use more information sources than fathers (Crase et al., 1981), and mothers and fathers want information on different topics (Bartz, 1978). Furthermore, Block's (1983) extensive review of literature on differences in parenting practices shows that parents view the process of socializing girls differently than the process of socializing boys. The complexities associated with higher-order interactions among parent and child gender in terms of information use have not been examined in past studies, and

therefore are specifically explored in this study.

According to Hughes and Durio (1983), variation in family structure (one-parent, two-parent, step-family, etc.) is related to the ways mothers and fathers seek and use information sources. Parents in one-parent households tend to use fewer information sources than parents in two-parent households. Although the past studies have compared mothers' and fathers' patterns of information use, it has been beyond the scope of most studies to analyze these differences after controlling family structure (e.g., one parent, two parent, stepparent), and ordinal position of the child within the family (e.g., firstborn, last born, etc.). An additional purpose of this study is to extend an understanding of how mothers and fathers use information by controlling family structure variables.

Parental information use is the phrase used in this study to describe three aspects of how parents use and perceive information sources. First, the size of the parent's information network is measured to gain an understanding of how many sources of information parents use. Previous studies show that most parents gather information from many different sources such as books, physicians, and friends (Clarke-Stewart, 1978, Crase et al., 1981) However, no studies are available to describe how many sources, on the average, mothers' and fathers' consult when wanting information about their child's motor, social, and cognitive development.

A second aspect of parental information use examined in this study is the frequency of use of the information source. Past research has shown that some

sources of information such as friends and one's own parents are used frequently, while other sources such as pamphlets and television shows are used relatively infrequently (Keopke & Williams, 1991). The variable of frequency of use of the information source was examined to gain a clearer understanding of how frequently the information sources are used by parents.

The degree to which parents perceive information sources to be useful is the third aspect of parental information use explored in this study. According to Crase et al., (1981) the most useful sources of information are people sources such as friends, pediatricians, and teachers rather than mass media sources such as magazines and newspapers. The aspect of usefulness of the information source is included to determine if parents perceive variations in how useful information sources are for information about different aspects of development.

The collection of individual information sources used by a parent for information about a particular aspect of a child's development is conceptualized as a parent's information network. For example, one parent's information network related to a child's social development may consist of a spouse, a pediatrician, and a friend, whereas another parent's network may consist of a co-worker, their mother, and books. This view assumes parents have many different configurations of information networks that may be activated at different times for different purposes. This idea is akin to the idea of a parent's social support network (Cochran & Brassard, 1979), but is more accurately labelled a parent's information network.

In sum, the purpose of this study is to identify: 1) variations in parental information use based on the domain of the child's development for which the information is being sought; 2) the role of parent and child gender in patterns of parental information use; and 3) the extent to which parental information use varies with indicators of the child's development. Family structure, the child's age and ordinal position in the family were used as control variables for selecting the sample.

Method

Subjects

Sixty two-parent families participated in this study: 60 mothers (Mean age = 31 years; range = 23 to 40 years); 60 fathers (Mean age = 33 years; range = 24 to 44 years); and 60 children, 30 boys and 30 girls, (Mean age = 3 years, 10 months; range = 3 years, 0 months to 4 years, 1 month). Each child was the firstborn child of the family, and three years of age at the time of consent to participate in the study. At the time of participation in the study both parents and child lived in the same household. All parents were either the biological or adoptive parents of the three-year-old child.

The families were recruited through day care centers, nursery schools, family day care homes and special summer programs in a medium-sized Midwestern community. Most of the parents either attended some college, completed college or graduate school (79% of the mothers and 90% of the fathers). Most of the mothers and fathers reported that they worked outside of the home (46% of mothers and 75% of fathers worked full time, 18% of mothers and 5% of fathers worked part time, and 22%

of mothers and 20% of fathers were currently students or worked on an irregular basis). Fourteen percent of the mothers and none of the fathers reported that they did not work outside the home. A total of 38 of the families had more than one child, and 22 of the families had one child.

Measures

Parental Information Use Interview. Through a structured interview, the following characteristics of parental information use were examined: 1) Information network sizes (i.e., the number of information sources parents use for each of the three information domains); 2) Frequency of use of information sources (i.e., ratings of how often parents use each of the information sources); 3) Usefulness of information sources (i.e., ratings of how useful of each information source is to the parent).

Parents completed the following procedure three times, once for the information sources surrounding motor, social, and cognitive development. At the beginning of the interview parents were shown a list of 28 possible information sources that may be used when wanting information about their child's development. The 28 information sources are presented in Table 1. Parents were asked to identify the information sources they would use when wanting or needing information about their child's motor development by placing a check mark next to the information sources used when wanting information about their child's development. Parents then gave judgments regarding how often they used each checked information source and how useful was each information source. The comparable procedure was then completed for

information surrounding the child's social and cognitive development.

Nine scores (three size scores, three frequency of use scores, and three usefulness scores) were generated for each parent from the information use interview. The motor, social and cognitive information network size scores, each ranging from 0 to 28, reflect the number of information sources a parent reported using for information about each aspect of the child's development. The motor, social and cognitive frequency of use scores reflect how often parents reported using each information source. The frequency of use of information source scores range from 1 to 5 (1 = very rarely; 2 = rarely; 3 = occasionally; 4 = often; 5 = very often). The usefulness of the information source scores reflect the perceived usefulness of each information source. The usefulness of information sources scores range from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all useful; 2 = not very useful; 3 = somewhat useful; 4 = useful; 5 = very useful). The sums of the individual frequency of use and usefulness ratings were divided by the number of sources a parent selected from each domain to generate a total of three information network frequency of use scores and three network usefulness scores. The scores are expressed as averages, taking account of the differing sizes of the parents' information networks.

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test - Revised. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test - Revised (Dunn & Dunn, 1981), essentially an achievement test, was used to measure children's receptive vocabulary. Testing and scoring were conducted according to PPVT-R manual instructions. Standard scores were used in all analyses.

Procedures

Parents at preschools, day care centers, after-school programs and recreational facilities who had a three-year-old, firstborn child were sent letters inviting participation in the study. A family consented to participate by mailing the consent form to the investigators. Typically, at-home, evening interviews were scheduled with each family. Each interview was conducted by a male and a female graduate student. One interviewer administered the interview to the parents, while the other interviewer administered the PPVT-R to the child. The mother, father and child were located in separate areas of the home and were asked not to consult each other regarding any questions.

Results

Descriptive Information About Parent Information Use

Table 1 shows the percent of mothers and fathers who use each information source by domain of development. From the complete list of 28 sources, the five most frequently mentioned information sources across the three developmental domains are included in the barcharts presented in Figure 1. The barcharts show that mothers and fathers use the information sources at different rates of frequency. Fathers tend to use their spouses for information about all aspects of the child's development, whereas there was not one consistent information source used by the greatest percentage of mothers for all three types of information. Mothers tend to use physicians for motor development, magazines and preschool teachers for social development, and

preschool teachers for cognitive development. A greater percentage of mothers than fathers report reading books and magazines about the child's development for information about all three aspects of development.

There are some consistencies in the way mothers and fathers seek information, however. A greater percentage of both mothers and fathers seek information from physicians for information about the child's motor development than for information about the child's cognitive or social development, and a greater percentage of mothers and fathers seek information about the child's cognitive development from the child's preschool teacher.

Mean Score Differences

Mean score differences in information network characteristics were analyzed in the following way. Three separate repeated measures analysis of variance models were computed to identify mean differences in the information network characteristics. In all three analyses, parent gender and information domain were treated as within subjects variables, and child gender and child's developmental level were treated as between subjects variables. The dependent variables for the analyses were information network size, frequency of use and usefulness of information network. Student-Newman-Keuls post hoc analyses were computed on the mean scores of all significant interactions.

Size of Information Network. A significant child gender by child development interaction was identified on the size of the information network scores, $F(2,54) = 3.22$,

$p < .05$. Post hoc analyses revealed that the information networks were significantly larger for parents of girls who scored in the lowest third on the PPVT-R (Mean = 7.24, S. D. = 1.99) than for girls who scored in the middle third (Mean = 4.35, S. D. = 2.32) or highest third of the sample (Mean = 4.97, S. D. = 1.70), ($F(2,27) = 5.28$, $p < .01$). Parents' information networks also were significantly larger for parents of girls who scored in the lowest third on the PPVT-R (Mean = 7.24, S. D. = 1.99) than for parents of boys who scored in the lowest third (Mean = 5.52, S. D. = 1.84), $F(1,17) = 5.08$, $p < .04$. Thus, parents of girls who scored in the lowest third on the PPVT-R had significantly larger information networks than parents of low scoring boys and parents of children who scored in the middle or highest thirds of the sample.

A significant three-way child development by information domain by parent gender interaction was identified on the size of the information network scores, $F(4,108) = 3.14$, $p < .02$. Post-hoc comparisons show that mothers' information networks are significantly larger for information relating to a child's social development (Mean = 6.42, S. D. = 3.96) than a child's cognitive (Mean = 5.12, S. D. = 3.25) or motor (Mean = 5.32, S. D. = 2.96) development, $F(2,108) = 6.49$, p,.002. Fathers' information networks were significantly larger for information related to a child's social development (Mean = 5.60, S. D. = 3.66) and motor development (Mean = 5.77, S. D. = 3.52) than a child's cognitive development (Mean = 4.53, S. D. = 2.88), $F(2, 108)=10.14$, $p < .001$. Therefore, parents of preschoolers tend to seek information from the greatest number of sources for information about the child's social

development, while the fewest sources were consulted for information about the child's cognitive development.

An information domain by parent gender interaction emerged for parents of children who scored in the lowest third of the PPVT-R, $F(2,34)=6.47$, $p < .004$. Mothers of children who scored in the lowest third had significantly larger social information networks (Mean = 6.79, S. D. = 3.94) than motor information networks (Mean = 4.95, S. D. = 2.46), $F(2,34)=3.64$, $p < .04$. Fathers of children who scored in the lowest third had significantly larger information networks for information related to a child's social development (Mean = 5.60, S. D. = 3.66) and motor development (Mean = 5.77, S. D. 3.52) than for information related to a child's cognitive development (Mean = 4.53, S. D. 2.88), $F(2,34) = 4.87$, $p < .01$. Both mothers and fathers of children who scored in the lowest third of the sample had significantly larger information networks for information related to the child's social development than cognitive development.

However, within the less frequently used cognitive information network, the parents of children who scored in the lowest third (Mean = 5.66, S. D. = 2.44) on the PPVT-R reported significantly larger information networks than parents of children who scored in the middle third on the PPVT-R (Mean = 4.10, S. D.=1.97), but they did not differ significantly from parents of children who scored in the highest third on the PPVT-R (Mean = 4.95, S. D. = 2.34), $F(2,54) = 3.40$, p, .04. This finding shows that although the relative use of information sources for information about a child's cognitive development is low in comparison to social development, the mothers and fathers of

children who scored in the lowest third on the PPVT-R use a greater number of information sources for information about the child's cognitive development than parents of children who scored in the middle third of the sample. Taking the cognitive and social information network findings together, parents of children who scored in the lowest third of the sample tend to seek more information about both social and cognitive development than parents of children who scored in the middle third, and, in most cases, than the parents of children who scored in the highest third of the sample.

Although the size of the cognitive information network for children scoring in the middle third of the sample does not differ significantly from the size of the parents' cognitive network for either low or high scoring children, it is interesting to note that the smallest information network out of all the domains and ability levels is found on the cognitive network for average performing children. This pattern holds true for both mothers and fathers.

Frequency of Use of Information Networks. The frequency of use ANOVA revealed a significant child gender by information domain by parent gender interaction, $F(4,108) = 4.03$, $p < .02$. The post hoc analyses showed that mothers and fathers use information sources at different rates of frequency. Mothers report using information sources for social development (Mean = 3.07, S. D. = .68) significantly more frequently than information about children's cognitive (Mean = 2.44, S. D. = .82) or motor development (Mean = 2.83, S. D. = .79), $F(2,108)=27.16$, $p < .0001$. Like mothers, fathers report using information sources about a child's social development (Mean =

3.00, S. D. = .80) significantly more frequently than a child's motor development (Mean = 2.59, S. D. = .82), $F(2,108) = 7.94$, $p < .001$).

For all three domains of information fathers of boys (Motor Mean = 2.77, S. D.= .92, Social Mean = 3.27, S. D. = .80, and Cognitive Mean = 3.14, S. D. = .83) used information sources significantly more frequently than fathers of girls (Motor Mean = 2.41, S. D. = .69, Social Mean = 2.73, S. D. = .72, Cognitive Mean = 2.82, S. D. = .71), $F(1,54) = 6.85$, $p < .01$. In contrast, only for the cognitive information sources did mothers of boys (Mean = 2.66, S. D. = .74) use the information sources significantly more frequently than mothers of girls (Mean = 2.23, S. D. = .85). Therefore, the post hoc analyses highlighting parent and child gender findings show that mothers and fathers report using information sources significantly more frequently for information about the child's social development than other aspects of development, and fathers of boys report using the information sources significantly more frequently than fathers of girls for information about all aspects of development.

The separate post hoc analyses examining mean differences by information domain revealed the following findings. For the cognitive information domain, fathers (Mean = 2.98, S. D. = 78) used the cognitive information sources significantly more frequently than mothers (Mean = 2.44, S. D. = 82), $F(1,54) = 16.58$, $p < .0001$. Considering the motor information domain, mothers of girls (Mean = 2.87, S. D. =.79) reported using motor information sources significantly more frequently than fathers of girls (Mean = 2.41, S. D. = .69), $F(1,29) = 8.64$, $p < .006$.

Within the social domain, a parent gender by child gender interaction was identified, $F(1,54) = 5.93$, p, .02. Mothers of girls (Mean = 3.12, S. D. = 64) used social information sources significantly more frequently than fathers of girls (Mean = 2.73, S. D. = 72), $F(1,29) = 5.26$, $p < .03$), whereas fathers of boys (Mean = 3.27, S. D.= .80) used the social information sources significantly more frequently than fathers of girls (Mean = 2.73, S. D.=.72), $F(1,58) = 7.44$, $p < .008$. Therefore, post hoc comparisons highlighting differences by the domain of development show 1) that fathers use the cognitive information sources more frequently than mothers, 2) mothers of girls use motor development significantly more frequently than fathers of girls and 3) a same-gender parent-child interaction emerged on the frequency of use of the social information sources scores.

Usefulness of Information Network. The ANOVA on the usefulness of the information network variable revealed a significant domain by parent gender interaction, $F(2,108) = 18.88$, $p < .0001$. The post hoc analysis revealed that mothers perceive the cognitive information sources (Mean = 3.25, S. D. = .71) as significantly less useful than the motor (Mean = 4.00, S. D. = .53) or social (Mean = 3.94, S. D. = .42) information sources, $F(2,108) = 43.48$, $p < .0001$. Furthermore, mothers perceived the cognitive information sources (Mean = 3.25, S. D. = .71) as significantly less useful than did the fathers (Mean = 3.90, S. D. .78), $F(1,54) = 17.90$, $p < .0001$.

Therefore, the findings show that for mothers, the cognitive information sources are the least useful of the three information domain sources, and in comparison to fathers, mothers perceive the cognitive information sources to be less useful.

Discussion

This findings of this study show that parental information use varies according to all four aspects explored in this study. The domain of the child's development for which the information is sought emerged as an important variable in understanding parental information use. Parents use a greater number of information sources and use the sources more frequently for children's social development than motor and cognitive development. Important variations in information use are identified for information about a child's cognitive development. The finding that parents of girls who scored in the lowest third on the PPVT-R tend to have larger information networks than parents of children scoring in the middle or highest third of the sample shows that the child's level of development is an important variable in understanding parental information use. Mothers and fathers differ from one another in terms of the actual information sources they use, and the frequency of use and the usefulness of the cognitive information sources. For most kinds of information, parents of boys use information sources more frequently than parents of girls.

An important lesson of this study is that information use varies by the domain of the child's development for which the information is sought. The examination of the individual information sources shows that parents tend to consult physicians for

information about the child's motor development, and they consult teachers for information about the child's cognitive and social development. This finding suggests that parents view different information sources as having specialized knowledge about their child. Whereas parents appear to believe that a physician is able to tell a parent how the child's physical development compares with that of other three-year-olds, it seems that parents do not perceive the physician as an expert on matters such as how well the child shares toys in preschool or when a child should be able to recognize numbers or colors. This finding suggests that parents use a method of information seeking based on the unique information or expertise an information source may have about the child's development. For early childhood educators, this finding highlights the role of preschool teachers as an important disseminators of information about children's cognitive and social development.

Parents of preschool-age children have the largest and most frequently used information networks for information about the child's social development. There are at least two possible explanations for this finding. First, parents of three-year-old children may feel the greatest need for information about helping their child master developmental tasks associated with getting along with others, personality development, and daily routines. This explanation is consistent with the findings of Crase et al., (1981) showing that mothers and fathers reported needing most information about dealing with aggression, developing self confidence in the child, and setting limits. Parents of preschoolers may see the development of social tasks as the

critical tasks of the preschool years, while cognitive development becomes the primary tasks in middle-childhood. A second explanation for this finding is that parents believe they have more influence over their child's development in the social domain than in other domains (Knight & Goodnow, 1988), and therefore are more likely to want to exert their influence in the social domain by gathering and using information to promote the child's social development.

The child's developmental level, as measured by child performance on the PPVT-R, was significantly related to the size of parents' information networks for parents of girls, not parents of boys. An attributional theory explanation would suggest that parents of girls who are developing less optimally may be surprised, concerned or worried about the daughters' development, and therefore would be more likely to seek information about the daughter's development. A maturational perspective would further suggest that the concern would be identified earlier in parents of girls than parents of boys since girls generally mature faster than boys (Espenschade & Eckert, (1980). However, from a social learning perspective, one could explain the finding by suggesting that today's parents are less sure of how to raise girls, worry more about raising girls (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974), and feel a greater need for information than parents of boys. Given the changes that have occurred in expectations for girls, parents may be less sure of how to guide a daughter's than a son's development. While the child is still very young, parents of girls who are developing more slowly than age-equivalent peers may feel more pressure to promote the child's development, and

therefore may seek more information about the daughter's development in order to help her achieve her potential.

The finding that information use is related to the child's development is important for practitioners interested in disseminating information to parents. Practitioners may conclude that parents of girls who are seeking information about their child's development are more likely to have daughters who are developing at a slower rate than their age-equivalent peers. The parents who are seeking the information may be experiencing greater concern over their child's development than a parent of a child who is developing at a faster rate. Although not measured in this study, it seems feasible that the parent may also be looking for specific answers to concerns or worries about their child's development.

Although mothers and fathers seek information in similar ways under many circumstances, there are a number of ways that mothers and fathers seek and use information differently from one another. One way they differ is with respect to the actual sources of information parents use. Whereas, both mothers and fathers used physicians, teachers, magazines, and spouses frequently, the greatest percentage of mothers used physicians and teachers for information, and the greatest percentage of fathers used their spouses for information about the child's development. This pattern of findings suggests that mothers are likely to be the parent in two-parent families who collect information from professional information sources outside of the family, while fathers are more likely to consult their spouse. Fathers may view their spouse as the

"expert" on the child since she has gathered the information from specialized sources that have detailed knowledge about the child.

Fathers and mothers are similar in terms of the overall number of information sources they use, and how frequently they use the information sources. Mothers and fathers differ, however, in the frequency with which they use specific information sources (e.g., teachers, physicians, books, spouses) for information about different aspects of the child's development (e.g., social, motor, and cognitive development). Based on the results of this study, both mothers and fathers should be viewed as parents who are involved in the process of gathering information about the child's development; however, they should be viewed as going about the task of gathering information in different ways. This conceptualization is not consistent with the past research showing that fathers seek less information than mothers (Clarke-Stewart, 1978; Crase et al., 1981).

Whereas, fathers use cognitive information sources more frequently than mothers, mothers (of girls) use the social and motor information sources more frequently than fathers (of girls). The finding that mothers seek more information about children's social and motor development and fathers seek more information about children's cognitive development may reflect the expressive versus instrumental personality differences (Huston, 1983) in mothers and fathers. Fathers may perceive their role as parent as contributing primarily to the child's cognitive development, whereas, especially for mothers of girls, mothers may perceive their role as one of

helping the child to develop social skills.

The finding that mothers of girls use motor information sources more frequently than fathers of girls is intriguing. Past research has shown that fathers tend to be more involved with their sons' than daughters' physical and motor development (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). However, relatively little is known about the contributors to a daughters' motor development. The finding that parents of same-sex children interact more with their children than cross-sex children (Huston, 1983) may be related to the ways that parents seek and use information, especially about female children's motor development.

The most consistent child gender difference found in this study is the finding that both mothers and fathers of boys use cognitive information sources more frequently than parents of girls. The attributional explanation for this finding is that parents of boys perceive a greater need for information about their sons' development than do parents of girls. It is unclear from the findings of the study if parents of boys perceive the greater need for information due to perceived deficits in their sons' development, or if they place greater importance on the cognitive development of their sons than they do their daughters, as suggested by Block's (1973, 1978) findings.

In summary, the findings of this paper provide considerable evidence that there are many linkages between how mothers and fathers seek and use information about their child's development and aspects of the child's development. Consistent with the larger literature on gender differences, mothers and fathers of boys and girls tend to

seek and use information in complex, gender-related ways. Parents of lower scoring girls tend to seek information from a greater number of sources than parents of children who score average or above average on a measure of receptive vocabulary acquisition. Finally, this study shows that parents have different patterns of information use based on the domain of the child's development for which the information was sought.

References

Bartz, (1978). Selected childrearing tasks and problems of fathers and mothers. The Family Coordinator, 27, 209-214. In Beck, A. T. (1967). Depression: clinical, experimental, and theoretical aspects. New York: Harper & Row.

Bell, R. Q. (1968). A reinterpretation of the direction of effects in studies of socialization. Psychological Review, 75, 81-95.

Block, J. H. (1973). Conceptions of sex roles: Some cross cultural and longitudinal perspectives. American Psychologist, 28, 512-526.

Block, J. H. (1978). Another look at sex differentiation in the socialization behaviors of mothers and fathers. In J. A. Sherman & F. L. Denmark (Eds.), The psychology of women: Future directions in research (pp.29-87). New York: Psychological Dimensions.

Block, J. H. (1983). Differential premises arising from differential socialization of the sexes: Some conjectures. Child Development, 54, 1335-1354.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brooks-Gunn, J. (1985). Maternal beliefs about children's sex-typed characteristics as they related to maternal behavior. In E. Sigel (Ed.), Parental belief systems: Psychological consequences for children. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Clarke-Stewart, K. A. (1978). Popular primers for parents. American Psychologist, 359-369.

Cochran, M., & Brassard, J. (1979). Child development and personal social networks. Child Development, 50, 601-616.

Crase, S. J., Carlson, C., & Kontos, S. (1981). Parent education needs and sources as perceived by parents. Home Economics Research Journal, 9, 221-231.

Dunn, L. M., & Dunn, L. M. (1981). Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test - Revised Manual for Forms L and M. American Guidance Service: Circle Pines, Minnesota.

Espenschade, A. S., & Eckert, H. M. (1980). Motor development. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company.

Geboy, M. J. (1981). Who is listening to the "experts"? The use of child care materials by parents. Family Relations, 30, 205-210.

Goodnow, J. J. (1988). Parents' ideas, actions, and feelings: Models and methods from developmental and social psychology. Child Development, 59, (2), 286-320.

Goodnow, J. J., & Collins, A. (1990). Development according to parents: The nature, sources, and consequences of parents' ideas. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hughes, Jr., R., & Durio, H. F. (1983). Patterns of child care information seeking by families. Family Relations, 32, 203-212.

Huston, A. C. (1983). Sex-typing. In P. Mussen (Ed.), Handbook of child psychology (pp.387-468). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Knight, R. A., & Goodnow, J. J. (1988). Parents' beliefs about influence over cognitive and social development. International Journal of Behavioral Development, 11(4), 517-527

Koepke, J., & Williams, C. (1989). Child-rearing information: Resources parents use. Family Relations. 38, 462-465.

Maccoby, E. , & Jacklin, C. (1974). The psychology of sex differences. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Maccoby, E., & Martin, J. (1983). Socialization in the context of the family: Parent-child interaction. In P. Mussen (Ed.) Handbook of Child Psychology (pp.1-102). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

McGillicuddy-DeLisi, A. V. (1982). Parental beliefs about developmental processes. Human Development, 25, 192-200.

Parke, R.D., & Bhavnagri, N. P. (1989). Parents as managers of children's peer relationships. In D. Belle (Ed.), Children's social networks and social supports (pp.241-259). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Parke, R. D., & Slaby, R. G. (1983). The development of aggression. In P. H. Mussen (Ed.), Handbook of child psychology, (pp.547-642). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Weiner, B. (1986). An attributional theory of motivation and emotion. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Table 1

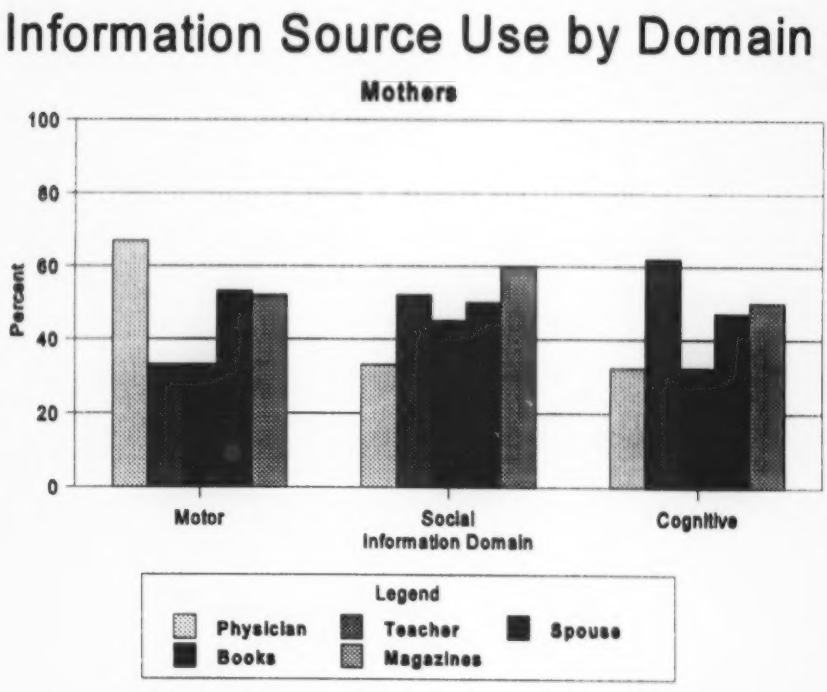
Average Percentage of Mothers and Fathers Using Each Information Source Related to Motor, Social, and Cognitive Development

	Motor		Social		Cognitive	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
<u>Personal Sources</u>						
Your mother	45%	33%	42%	23%	37%	22%
Your father	6%	17%	12%	6%	2%	3%
Mother-in-law	20%	22%	18%	17%	12%	12%
Father-in-law	2%	8%	2%	3%	2%	6%
Spouse	33%	70%	45%	75%	32%	82%
Sister/Brother	20%	32%	27%	28%	18%	22%
Other Relatives	5%	5%	2%	1%	6%	5%
Neighbors	25%	17%	23%	2%	10%	8%
Other families	32%	30%	55%	33%	35%	27%
Others	33%	40%	43%	45%	30%	32%
Babysitter	15%	8%	23%	18%	23%	18%
Friend	28%	17%	32%	33%	30%	17%
<u>Professional Sources</u>						
Physician	67%	57%	33%	25%	32%	20%
CD Prof.	13%	8%	15%	6%	15%	3%

Agency	0%	1%	3%	0%	3%	2%
Courses	13%	3%	15%	5%	10%	2%
Teacher	33%	23%	52%	25%	62%	33%
Minister	2%	3%	6%	3%	5%	2%
Beliefs/Intuitions						
Religious Teaching	3%	5%	12%	3%	5%	2%
Intuitions	15%	22%	25%	27%	25%	25%
Own Experience	13%	35%	23%	35%	13%	22%
Astrology	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Mass Media						
TV Talk Shows	8%	15%	13%	6%	10%	5%
Books	53%	37%	50%	36%	47%	37%
Lectures	5%	3%	5%	5%	5%	2%
Magazines	52%	55%	60%	47%	50%	38%
Famous People	0%	3%	0%	3%	2%	0%
Radio	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Other	3%	5%	6%	6%	5%	3%

Figure 1

Most Frequently Consulted Information Sources by Domain of Development



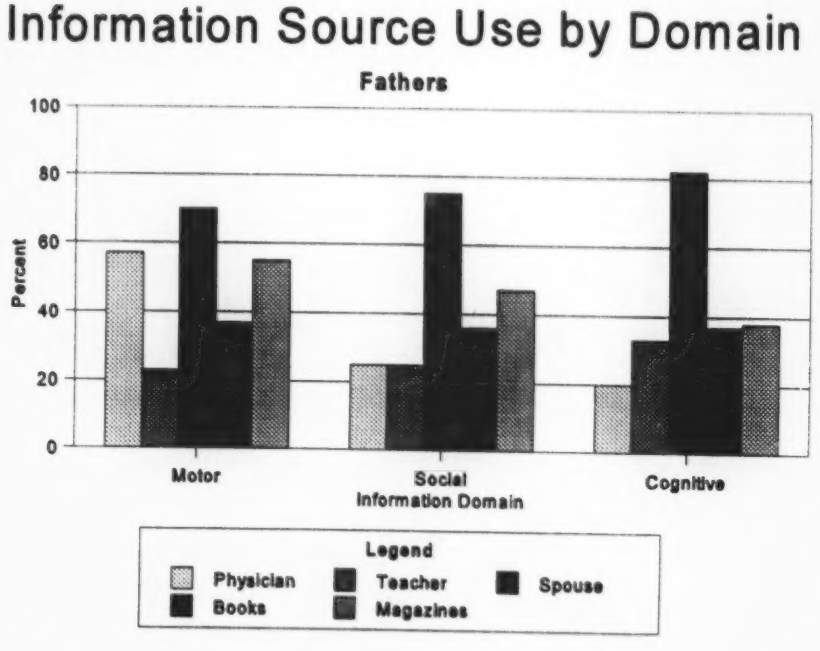


Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Mothers' and Fathers' Information Network Characteristic Scores.

		Mothers		Fathers	
		Mean	S. D.	Mean	S. D.
Network Size					
	Motor	5.3	3.0	5.8	3.5
	Social	6.4	3.9	5.6	3.6
	Cognitive	5.1	3.3	4.5	2.9
Frequency of Use					
	Motor	2.8	.79	2.6	.82
	Social	3.1	.68	3.0	.80
	Cognitive	2.4	.82	3.0	.78
Usefulness					
	Motor	4.0	.53	3.9	.67
	Social	3.9	.42	3.8	.68
	Cognitive	3.3	.71	3.9	.78